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ABSTRACT

Aspects of communication between home and school are discussed in four chapters. Introductory remarks point out two very important messages in the research on the effects of parental involvement. The first is that the gap between working class and middle-class children in school achievement is explained, in substantial part, by certain differing patterns of child-parent and parent-school interaction. A second and even more important message is that school personnel can intervene positively and efficiently to teach most parents to be as effective as some parents already are. Chapter I focuses on parental involvement with children at home at the preschool, primary, junior, intermediate, and senior levels. Chapter II concerns parental involvement at school. Chapter III discusses the whys and hows of connecting parents and schools. Chapter IV deals with overcoming barriers and getting commitment in parent-teacher partnerships. A bibliography is included. (RH)

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THE EFFECTS OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT ON CHILDREN'S ACHIEVEMENT: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HOME/SCHOOL LINKS

Suzanne Ziegler

#185

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY*

1. The influence of the home on children's success at school is profound. Whether indirectly, as models, or directly, as readers, audience, or homework helpers, parents' learning-related and school-related activities at home are a very strong influence on children's long-term academic success.

   a. Longitudinal research on children in pre-school programs strongly supports the above statement: when parents are involved at the pre-school stage, through a rich program of home visits from staff and/or in-school involvement, the positive benefits for their children's education are very far-reaching. The benefits are seen in higher achievement rates, higher attendance rates, lower delinquency and drop-out rates, and higher high school completion and college/university admission rates. It is striking and important that most of the research is based not on a prosperous and well-educated population, but rather on families whose children are at high risk for school failure.

   b. At the primary school level, considerable research supports the effectiveness of parent involvement at home. Most researched and most widely practiced is the home reading program, often called borrow-a-book, in which parents and children read together on a regular basis, with teacher support and linkage. Such programs are shown to be effective with parents of varied language backgrounds and with no or low as well as higher literacy skills. Some very recent research suggests that such programs may be of limited effectiveness if they do not include active and recurring communication between school and home.

   c. Teachers of older children involve parents much less frequently, although evidence suggests strongly that parents want to have a role in helping their children well beyond the primary years. Evidence also suggests that the power of home-school communication links to improve school performance is still considerable at this age, although less thought has been given to developing appropriate parent-involving curricula.

   d. The children of parents who are aware of what their offspring are studying at school and who are in regular communication with their teachers continue to show higher school achievement than others, all the way through secondary school. The types of parental

*Points 1 to 4 corresponds to Chapters I - IV.

involvement most appropriate for older students may differ from those for younger ones, but the basic principle holds.

2. Parental involvement in their children's education is equally powerful whether the involvement occurs at home or at school. Parents who, as volunteers or teachers' aides, become familiar with the classroom environment and skilled at assisting teachers have a salutory influence on their children's progress at school. Unfortunately, most parents cannot be at school during the day, so this kind of beneficial involvement is open to only a very small minority. However, schools which reach out to parents by incorporating a parents' room into the school and by being very proactive in inviting parents in during the day or evening do find a substantial increase in the amount and quality of parental involvement.

3. The effectiveness of parental involvement may be explained by the message children receive when they see their teachers and parents in direct, personal contact centred on the children's learning and progress. The message is one of consistency and caring in both of the environments, or behaviour settings, in which they must function. If this is a correct hypothesis, then the more direct, first-hand, frequent and personal the teacher-parent contact, and the more visible that contact is to the child, the greater is its potential.

   Policies at school and system levels can have a very significant influence on teachers' practices in the area of parent communication. When school-based events are planned which draw parents into a partnership, it is most often because of the initiative of the school principal in organizing such events as make-and-take workshops, parent education, and other school-level programs.

4. Many parents are uneasy about contacting the school if they have concerns about their children's academic progress. However, most parents value teachers who initiate contact with them about their children's progress, and are responsive to that initiative.

   Teachers who involve parents and communicate with them frequently tend to describe all kinds of parents as responsive and helpful. Teachers who are much less accustomed to involving parents are more doubtful of parents' ability to help.

   When teachers appreciate the irreplaceable value of parental involvement in increasing children's achievement, they are motivated to be proactive in involving parents and they help to create effective partnerships between home and school which make a very substantial positive difference to children's futures.

THE EFFECTS OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT ON CHILDREN'S ACHIEVEMENT: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HOME/SCHOOL LINKS

FOREWORD

Under the Curriculum Implementation Plan (CIP, Phase II), Toronto schools have been directed to develop a written policy which addresses both homework and home/school links. An earlier paper produced by Research Services (Homework, 1986) reviewed some of the extensive literature on homework, with the intention of supplementing the knowledge base of teachers, administrators and parents who are working at developing school-based homework policies. The present paper attempts to offer similar support to the effort of developing optimal home/school communication policies. In fact, homework is probably most appropriately viewed as one very important example of a home-school communication link. The present paper discusses the broader topic.

As schools address the task of developing explicit policies on school-home links, they will undoubtedly be looking for both general principles which guide effective policy as well as some specific recommendations based on effective practices. This paper attempts to address both needs, to some extent.

Experienced school administrators, teachers and parents can draw on their own knowledge of what has worked. Hopefully, this paper will offer them some new ideas as well. But the main intention of the paper is to strengthen the commitment of all partners in the schooling process to the task of affirming and fortifying their shared ownership and support children's education. The evidence suggests that no other single focus has the potential to be as productive for students as the closer linking of home and school, of parents and teachers.

> There is very little the school can do towards removing poverty or improving the adverse social conditions in which many such parents live. Yet, if we want children to achieve more, especially working class children, then improved home-school liaison and increased parental involvement must be a top priority. Cooperative home-school relations will enhance everything the school does. . .there are some ways in which most schools could improve their home-school relations. In our view, even the best practice does not go far enough in the light of the importance of parental involvement to any serious attempt to reduce pupil underachievement and disaffection. More substantial changes are needed.
>
> (Hargreaves, 1984, pp. 14-17)

It is our hope that this paper will be useful to educators, at school and home, in their common effort to strengthen the learning opportunities of children.

THE EFFECTS OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT ON CHILDREN'S ACHIEVEMENT: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HOME/SCHOOL LINKS

Introduction

There can be no more powerful argument in favour of parental involvement in their children's schooling than the fact that it is strongly and positively associated with children's achievement in school and attitude toward learning. On this point, the evidence is very clear.

> The recent acknowledgements of the importance of parent involvement are built on research findings accumulated over two decades that show that children have an advantage in school when their parents encourage and support their school activities. Research on family environments has consistently documented the importance of parent involvement at all grade levels. . . (Epstein, 1986a, p.1)

When parents are effectively involved in their children's education, studies report improved student attitudes, conduct, and attendance as well as improved classroom performance (Lyons, et al., 1983) A review of 37 research studies done between 1966 and 1981 on the effect of parental involvement on student achievement at the elementary and secondary levels, concludes that:

> The evidence is growing. According to recent studies, parent involvement in almost any form improves student achievement. (Henderson, 1981, p.8)

The importance of the home to student achievement has often been phrased in a negative way, to suggest that there is little that schools can do to alter the effects of home, with the consequence that children from middle-class families do better, on average, than children from working-class families -- even when they attend the same schools and have the same teachers; or even, which is worse, when the poorer children are given compensatory or

"extra" educational resources at school. This was the strong message of the Coleman Report of 1966, and of Jencks' 1972 report on Inequality, and an important part of the Plowden Report in the United Kingdom.

It was largely the reaction against the message that schools cannot overcome the inequalities in achievement associated with social class that researchers such as Michael Rutter began attempting to compare schools and isolate characteristics which distinguish the more effective ones. His work in London (Rutter et al., 1979) indicated that secondary schools do indeed differ significantly in their effects on the achievement of working-class students. His study has been followed by a great deal of work in North America on defining the characteristics of effective elementary and secondary schools.

But if the effective schools literature, as encouraging as it may be, is misread to mean that good schools need not pay attention to students' home environments because schools can take care of the job of providing good education without assistance from parents, a grave error will be made. Coleman and Jencks are right, and so is Rutter: home does matter, hugely, and so does school. In fact, descriptions of effective schools often include parental involvement in and support of the work of the school as one of the basic and most important characteristics of school effectiveness. (See Fullan, 1985, and Purkey and Smith, 1983.) Sometimes, however, summaries of the characteristics of effective

schools make no mention whatsoever of parents. (See Manitoba, 1986, for example.) Such an omission, research suggests, may have profoundly negative results for children.

The research on the effects of parental involvement has two very strong and very important messages. The first is, that the gap so frequently found between working class and middle class children in school achievement is explained, in substantial part, by certain differing patterns of child-parent and parent-school interaction.

> The evidence is clear that parental encouragement, activities and interest at home and participation in schools and classrooms affect children's achievements, attitudes, and aspirations, even after student ability and family socioeconomic status are taken into account. Students gain in personal and academic development if their families emphasize schools, let the children know they do, and do so continually over the school years. However, not all families currently become involved in school- related activities or show interest in their children's school work. And, not all schools actively encourage and direct parent involvement.
>
> (Epstein, 1986a, p.1-2)

> When parents show a strong interest in their children's schooling, they promote the development of attitudes that are key to achievement, attitudes that are more a product of how the family interacts than of its social class or income. If schools treat parents as powerless or unimportant, or if they discourage parents from taking an interest, they promote the development of attitudes in parents, and consequently their children, that inhibit achievement.
>
> (Henderson, 1981, p. 10)

Striking evidence of the power of parent involvement to alter children's success in school in spite of parents' social and educational background is found in a very recent publication,

which uses a random sample of American families as its data base (Stevenson and Baker, 1987). The authors found that while mother's educational level is a strong predictor of parental involvement, it is important to children's school performance only when parental involvement occurs. That is, mother's education by itself, without mother's/parents' involvement in the child's education, does not predict school success. Better-educated mothers are more likely to become involved -- but it is only when they do so that their own educational advantage becomes salient for their child's achievement at school.

A second and even more important message of research is that school personnel can intervene positively, effectively and efficiently to teach most parents to be as effective as some parents already are. Differences between families as learning environments are not based on unalterables. Research indicates that the attitudes of parents who have felt unimportant and powerless and the academic outcomes for their children who are performing poorly in school can be changed, by parent involvement which is well-planned and long-lasting.

> The fact that family socioeconomic status (SES) is related to school achievement doesn't mean that rich kids are born smarter. It means that, in more affluent families, children are more likely to be exposed to experiences that stimulate intellectual development. For example, they may be read to more often. They may see their parents read and conclude that reading is fun and is something they would like to learn to do. They are more likely to hear -- and to learn to use -- language that is similar to the language they will hear in schools. . .

> Clearly, then, while SES and family background correlate with achievement, other home factors are important too. Parents' interest in school, involvement with education, reading to their children, and positive attitudes about learning are the kinds of things that influence children's school achievement. Many times attitudes of parents are rooted in their own experiences with school. These attitudes are not likely to change without intervention. But the encouraging note is that attitudes and behaviors can be changed. (Sattes, 1985, p. 2, 3, 4)

A most important point to be made about parental involvement in children's education is that, as powerful as it is, and as effective as all parents can be as co-educators, very many of them will never realize that potential -- and hence, their children will never achieve <u>their</u> potential -- unless schools and teachers reach out to them. In fact, one investigator points out that, the more parent participation is accepted and encouraged, the more <u>inequity</u> may result as enthusiastic parents come forward and the "silent majority" remains silent. He suggests that aggressive outreach, including home visits, may be especially important to ethnic and linguistic minority families (Toomey, 1986).

This concern is substantiated in an American survey which found that only 24% of parents with incomes under $7,000 but 53% of those earning $25,000 or more had had two or more kinds of contact with schools in the preceding two years (Cantrel, 1979; cited by Moles, 1987, p. 138).

Because of this very real prospect of emphasis on parent involvement working against equity, some writers have suggested strategies for appropriate action.

> Parent advocates, administrators, and teachers who are also concerned about equity can and must intervene to be certain that protections are built into parent involvement policies and programs to counterbalance the natural middle-class advantages -- a kind of affirmative action, if you will, to benefit parents who are poor and have the lowest social status and the least political power. There is ample evidence that poor and minority parents care about their children and have a great deal to contribute to their education. There is ample evidence that poor people can organize effectively and affect public policies, and learn how to get information, to process it, and make wise decisions. Poor and minority parents can develop the competence and confidence needed to participate effectively in any of the forms of participation. But, society must have the political will to invest the time, money, and effort needed and to adopt policies that recognize social class inequities in order to intervene so that parent involvement plans do not, in fact, serve to reproduce rather than reduce existing inequities (Davies, 1987, p. 156).

The author goes on to emphasize that parent involvement policies should always include provision for funds and arrangements needed for helping in cases where parents can't or won't become involved, and adds that churches, social agencies, and grass-roots community organizations can help.

> School administrators and teachers must take the initiative to reach out to "hard to reach parents" and to devise a wide variety of ways for them to participate. This means having appropriately prepared and sensitive school representatives go into homes to meet with families, having some meetings outside the school in settings less intimidating and more accessible to many parents, using natural and informal settings to reach and talk with parents (churches, markets, social centers), preparing materials in other languages in the case of people whose English proficiency is weak, and scheduling activities that are attuned to the constituents being sought. But, the key point is that for many parents who are poor and from minority and immigrant groups, the initiative has to come from the school, and a diverse and persistent strategy is needed to break down barriers and establish trust. (Ibid, p. 157)

CHAPTER I. PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AT HOME

1. At the pre-school level

Gordon Wells' work illustrates that the effect of parental involvement in reading to pre-school children lasts beyond the school entry stage. Much more likely to occur when mothers are relatively well-educated, daily reading and discussion of stories with pre-schoolers was found to be related to children's likelihood of success, as measured at school entrance; and, even more strongly, to their level of performance in school two years later. (Wells, 1985)

In fact, the positive effect for children of their parents' involvement in their pre-school education has been shown to persist through their school career. The best known longitudinal study of this sort followed 128 children of the Perry Preschool Program for more than a decade. These children were from a congested slum area of a city in Michigan, an area with perennially high school failure rates and high crime rates. Children in the Perry Preschool Program attended pre-school five half-days a week for one school year. In addition, their parents were visited regularly in their home and encouraged to structure household activities and to include their children in accomplishing the tasks. During secondary school, these students exhibited (in interviews) a greater commitment to schooling. At age 15, they were more willing to talk to their parents about school, spent more time on homework and had a higher self-rating of school ability. Fifteen years after pre-school, at age 19,

students who had been in the program were far less likely than their comparable peers to have been involved in the court system, or to have been arrested, or to have been school drop-outs. Far more of them had graduated, were employed, and were self-supporting. Thirty-eight percent were attending university, and 48% were employed, at a time of very high unemployment, especially for black adolescents. (See Stallings and Stipek, 1986.)

While it is impossible to know, in the case of the Perry students, to what extent the involvement of parents (independent of the school-based children's program) made a difference, parent involvement, either at home or at school has been built in to many of the most successful pre-school programs. Long-term follow-up of several models of pre-school program, all of which included parent involvement, are consistent in finding effects that include fewer instances of grade repetition and of placement in special education (both of which are also important indicators of cost-effectiveness). Bronfenbrenner's review of early intervention programs found that the most successful programs, those in which gains in ability persisted well beyond the lifetime of the program, built in the involvement of the mother. Such effective programs are family-centred rather than child-centred. Beyond pre-school, what is required is "parental support of the child's activities at home and at school" because "parent remains the primary figure responsible for the child's development as a person" (Bronfenbrenner, 1972, p. 301). Another reviewer

similarly concludes that "parent involvement is the key to long-lasting effects from pre-school programs. Evidently, a change occurs in the home environment which supports and maintains school achievement". (Sattes, 1985, p. 5)

> Summative longitudinal research on the lasting effects of pre-school programs suggests that "closer contact between home and school and greater involvement of parents in the education of their children are probably more important than educational administrators had generally realized. . . what emerged as worth further investigation was a cluster of factors. . . [including] involvement of both parents and children. . . (Consortium, 1983, pp. 464 and 473).

2. At the primary level

While research on the effects of parental involvement at home with school-age children is less extensive than the pre-school research and is rarely longitudinal, it does, nonetheless, support the effectiveness of the intervention.

> For students in the primary and intermediate grades, parent involvement in instruction enhances achievement and affective outcomes. This holds true whether the parents serve as tutors at home, make themselves available for regular discussion sessions, provide feedback on the results of student homework, or serve as instructional helpers in their children's classrooms...
>
> Students who come from low-income backgrounds, who are members of ethnic minorities or who have learning disabilities are greatly benefitted, academically and affectively, when their parents become involved in their instruction. It is a happy irony that the very home- and family-related deficits which led to many of these children being identified as disadvantaged in the first place are being overturned in the home, by the family, through parent-assisted instructional projects.
>
> Providing orientation sessions to parents and then training them in how to conduct and monitor instruction, what the instructional materials contain, how to use them, and how to track their children's progress, greatly enhances their effectiveness as instructional supporters. Such practices also build positive parent-school relationships and build parents' self-esteem. (Cotton and Savard, 1982, p. 9)

While there is evidence that high levels of involvement have high payoff, it is also true that even programs which involve little special training and a very simple home program are effective. Here are four examples of such programs, involving primary-age children and their parents:

> -Project STEP (Systematic Training for Effective Parenting) included parents representing all SES levels from four elementary schools. Parents signed a contract, agreeing (1) to meet with their child at least twice a week to discuss the accomplishments of the past few days and to spend time sharing thoughts and ideas, and (2) to spend time each week with their child on a

reading-related activity. Children in the STEP program gained 12 months in reading compared to the control group's one-month gain. (Sattes, 1986, p. 8)

-A similar program was conducted in two schools whose students were described by the authors as "culturally deprived". In this project, parents attended discussion groups that emphasized the importance of school in preparing to get a job in today's technological society and the importance of parents in setting an example. Parents were asked to read daily to their children, to listen to their children read, to provide a routine "quiet" time at home for reading and study, and to be sure that children had the proper school supplies. Over the program's five-month duration, children showed overall gains of 5.4 months in reading compared to 2.7 months in a comparison school. (Ibid)

-In a study that involved second to fourth graders who were below grade level in reading, each of 69 students was assigned to one of three groups: a control group (who received no extra help), a peer-tutoring group (who were tutored by sixth to eighth grade students over a 15-week period), and a peer-tutoring plus home-based reinforcement group (same as the second group with the addition of contacts with the family by phone or note). Peer-tutoring made a significant difference, but the addition of contacts with the family (average total contact time was only one hour) further enhanced reading achievement. (Sattes, 1986, p. 9)

-In two inner-city elementary schools in Metropolitan Toronto, parents of problem readers attended a meeting to learn of the advantages to children of parent involvement in reading. Fourteen families agreed to listen to their child read for twenty minutes per school night over a six-month period. Fifty percent of the children involved were found to have made significant improvement in reading, "but improvement was noted for all children whose parents remained committed throughout the period." (Shuttleworth, 1986)

-In order to assess the effects of parental involvement in the teaching of reading, the researchers established a project in the London borough of Haringey whereby all children in two primary level experimental classes in two different schools read to their parents at home on a regular basis. The reading progress of these children was compared with that of children in two classes in two different schools who were given extra reading instruction in small groups by an experienced and qualified teacher who worked four half-days at each school every week for the two years of the intervention. Both groups were also compared with a control group that

> received no treatment. All the schools were in multiethnic areas, and there were many parents who did not read English or use it at home. It was found, nevertheless, to be both feasible and practicable to involve nearly all the parents in educational activities such as listening to their children read, even when the parents were nonliterate and largely non-English-speaking. It was also found that, almost without exception, parents welcomed the project, agreed to hear their children read, and completed a record card showing what had been read.
>
> The researchers report that parental involvement had a pronounced effect on the students' success in school. Children who read to their parents made significantly greater progress in reading than those who did not engage in this type of literacy sharing.* Small-group instruction in reading, given by a highly competent specialist, did not produce improvements comparable to those obtained from the collaboration with parents. In contrast to the home collaboration program, the benefits of extra reading instruction were least apparent for initially low-achieving children. In addition, the collaboration between teachers and parents was effective for children of all initial levels of performance, including those who, at the beginning of the study, were failing in learning to read. Teachers reported that the children showed an increased interest in school learning and were better behaved. Those teachers involved in the home collaboration found the work with parents worthwhile, and they continued to involve parents with subsequent classes after the experiment was concluded. It is interesting to note that teachers of the control classes also adopted the home collaboration program after the two-year experimental period. (Cummins, 1986, pp. 26-27)

Probably the commonest and most frequently evaluated form of parental assistance at home is of the kind described in the

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*66% of the children in the experimental group read at or above the national average, compared to 29% in control classes. Only 6% were poor readers, compared to 17% in the control classes. The "parent involvement" children still were significantly better readers at age 11. (Hannon and Tizard, 1987)

examples above, involving parents reading to or being read to by their primary-age (kindergarten to grade 4) children. As these examples indicate, the program involves little training for parents, and is very effective in promoting children's interest in reading and ability to read. Local examples, based on the Haringey experiment, include Borrow-a-Book and Read-and-Share programs in many Toronto schools, which are typically initiated by a group meeting with parents to ask their cooperation in spending about ten minutes a night reading to their child or listening to her read. Suggestions are made about how to be positive, encouraging, low pressure, and so forth. Often a system is involved whereby parents sign a card that travels home with the picture book the child has chosen, and which the parent signs to indicate he/she has read the book or heard it read. Parents who don't read English are reassured about the value and validity of the process, no matter what language is used. (The details of such programs and the research supporting them can be found in greater detail in a recent volume called Parental Involvement in Children's Reading. See Wolfendale and Topping, 1985.)

Involving parents in their children's education can prove to be extremely cost-effective. A simple series of "Home Learning Recipes" -- specific, practical no-cost activities for learning at home, which successfully build in family interaction and increase children's achievement in reading without duplicating school activities, were developed jointly by parents and teachers of

grade 1 children of less than average measured ability. The cost of this successful program was $4.83 per student per year. The cost for "pull-out" or special class instruction would have been $563. (Peck et al., 1979)

While it is true that even a small investment of planned, long-term parental involvement in their children's education has very substantial pay-off, it is also true that larger investments of time and effort yield larger rewards. For example, in a comparison of three models of parent involvement to improve children's reading skills in grades 2 to 6, all models showed significant effects. Model A involved two presentations to parents at an open house and a PTA meeting. Model B involved at least four informational meetings over the year. Model C built in an intensive in-service training program for administrators, teachers and parents, in which forty trained parent leaders conducted sessions for other parents. While all three models were successful, Model C showed significantly higher gains for students' reading abilities (Gillum, 1977, cited in Henderson, 1981, pp. 32-34). Similarly, a very recently released report from the Belfield Reading Project, which is based on the Haringey research cited above, suggests that less intensive parent involvement programs may be considerably less successful, and hypothesizes that home visits -- that is, continuing face to face contact between parents and teachers -- may be necessary in order to sustain the effects of parent-involvement programs (Hannon and Tizard, 1987).

3. At the junior level

Involving parents with children's school-related learning and practice at home in a planned fashion seems to be far less frequent beyond the primary years. In fact, many teachers resist assigning homework in the junior and intermediate divisions in part because they are concerned about inequalities in home resources (including parental ability to give positive support and assistance) and in part because they are concerned about the blurring of distinctions between the teaching and the parental role. There is abundant evidence, however, that most parents want to have a role in helping their children in school-related learning activities, are capable of doing so effectively, and make a positive difference when they do. In a recent survey of over 1,200 parents of children up to and including grade 5, in 16 school districts in Maryland, researchers found that more than 85% of the parents spent 15 minutes or more helping their child at home when asked to do so by the teacher. Most parents said they could spend more time if they were told how to help, but fewer than 25% received frequent and systematic requests and directions from teachers (Epstein, 1986). In the same survey, another investigator found that:

> Despite a general endorsement by teachers of parental involvement at home, very few appear to devote any systematic effort to making sure that parental involvement at home accomplishes particular learning goals in a particular way. Only 9% of the sample "required" parental cooperation, the rest made various "suggestions." (Fullan, 1982, p. 206)

Paraphrased, while the majority of teachers paid lip service

to the principle that parent involvement is important to children's success, a very small minority behaved as if they believed it.

That parents, including parents of older children, do depend on teacher-initiated contact is evidenced in many studies. In an ethnographic study, Chall and Snow (1982) point out that the gap between strong and weak readers is relatively small in the primary years, but tends to increase dramatically around grade 4 or 5. They illustrate the difference that teacher-initiated parent contact can make to this escalating decline in relative literacy (which is most frequent among working-class children).

> Jessica Williams and Derek Pagliuca. . . have had problems with reading in school. Neither of their families initiated contact with the school; as Debby Pagliuca said, "Teachers should take all the initiative." For children like Derek and Jessica, chances of getting support at home and the chances of their families being informed about school progress seems to be dependent on the teacher. During both years of the study, Derek's teachers telephoned and sent notes home to Debby concerning his academic problems; nobody at Jessica's school, however, communicated with Paula after Jessica was assigned to special education in third grade. While Derek's teacher sent home weekly reports on his progress, Paula Williams heard nothing from the school about Jessica's continuing problems. Although other factors were involved, it is interesting that at the end of the two years of our study, Derek was reading well above grade level and Jessica was still several years behind. (Chall and Snow, 1982, pp. 5-23 and 5-24)

The authors conclude that:

> The home and the school have both been shown to be powerful in explaining children's literacy skills. The interaction between home and school was also found to be of great importance in explaining children's literacy skills. Parents and some of the teachers had rather different views of the children's potential for future achievement, and parents tended to overestimate their children's academic skills. Parents viewed talks with

> teachers as important when the children were having academic problems, whereas teachers contacted parents primarily concerning behavioral problems.
>
> The gap between parents' and teachers' views was most effectively bridged in those cases where they had frequent contacts with one another. Contacts with parents increased teachers' expectations for the children, and affected the children's likelihood of making gains in reading. Yet, such contacts often did not occur precisely because the parents were receiving information suggesting that their children were performing adequately in school, and thus did not initiate contacts with the teachers. Since some teachers were not likely to initiate contact with parents simply because their children were performing below grade level, children could slip down in achievement without any remediating contact between parent and teacher being made. The teachers who contacted the parents of all the children frequently had better impressions of the helpfulness of the families, and were more likely to see their students making gains in reading. (Ibid, pp. 10-12 and 10-13)

Another study found that, when teachers frequently request parent involvement in learning activities at home, grade 5 students have more positive attitudes, do more homework on weekends, and see more ties between school and home (Epstein, 1985b). In spite of such findings, surveys show that the number of teachers who involve parents decreases dramatically after grade 1, and the number of parents who say they know how to help their children on schoolwork at home also declines with every grade (Opcit).

Given the strength of the evidence that what happens at home makes a difference to what happens at school; that some parents need input from teachers to become more effective supports to their children; and that most parents are eager as well as able to help, it clearly makes good sense for educators to look on parents

as allies in their children's education, allies with whom an investment of professional time is likely to have a very substantial return. Two additional examples of successful parent involvement programs for older elementary children will reinforce this conclusion:

> -In an Ontario Board of Education, researchers studied the effectiveness of a single, 45-minute parent training session on the reading and mathematical performance of 4 small samples of 7, 9, 10 and 11 year olds. Three of the studies used a structured reading kit (SRA) and one used an electronic mathematics tool (Little Professor) as the content of the parent-child interaction. In every study, there were significant differences in favour of the parent-involved children on follow-up tests after three, four or six months. (Goodlet and Goodlet, 1981)
>
> -Paired reading, in which children choose books to read with their parents (with parents providing immediate support and corrective feedback) has been very popular in the United Kingdom, including among Afro-Caribbean parents. Parents and children can be trained together in a single group meeting. They then contract into the scheme for some period of time -- such as, at least five sessions, per week of at least five minutes per session for six to eight weeks. "Evaluation studies show that children involved in paired reading on average make 3 times normal progress in reading accuracy and 5 times normal progress in reading comprehension. . . . paired reading has been demonstrated to be effective with children of all levels of assumed ability and potential. . . . children aged between 6 and 13 years have participated successfully and the technique has now been extended into the field of adult literacy. . .socioeconomic status has not been found to correlate with the success of projects, and even in disadvantaged areas, parental involvement has been sustained over long periods." (Topping, 1987, p. 613; see also Topping and Wolfendale, 1985.)

Some studies suggest that parent involvement appears to be more effective in primary than in later grades.

> -At a series of school meetings, parents of children in a low-income neighborhood were asked to provide their children with a quiet time (no TV, etc.) for homework

every school night, and to read aloud to their children daily. They were also given suggestions for frequent library visits. They were given such activities as dictionaries. At the same time, special programs in reading and social studies were mounted at the school. The evaluation showed significantly greater reading comprehension gains over the six-month period of the program, but these gains were much stronger at the grade 2 than the grade 5 level. (M. B. Smith, 1968)

-Over 800 students in grades 1-6 were tested in reading and mathematics at the end of the 1973-1974 school year and their scores were compared with those from the end of the previous year. Parent involvement consisted of 1) providing parents with "success reports" via written notes, fliers, home visits, and telephone calls, 2) holding informal parent group discussions, 3) encouraging parents to contact other parents, 4) sending home ideas for parents to work with children, 5) sending home notices of books, films, TV programs and cultural activities, 6) recruiting parents to participate in the afterschool parent program, 7) organizing parent-teacher mini- workshops. In addition, a continuing education and counselling program was established after school. All grades showed a significant increase in both reading and math scores. The gains were highest in the early grades, with a 20% increase in 1st grade students' reading at grade level, descending steadily to a 5.5% increase in 6th grade students' reading at grade level. (Gross, cited by Henderson, 1981, p. 41)

These weaker results at later grades may be the product of programs which are better-designed to meet the educational needs of younger than older students.Chall (1979) suggests that children from low-income families tend to fall behind in literacy after age 9 because, at the point where they pass developmentally from decoding, through the acquisition of fluent reading, to a third stage of "reading for learning the new" -- reading unfamiliar material for information and/or recreation -- their out-of-school learning experiences become indispensable as a foundation. It may be that at this stage, it is particularly vital for teachers to develop interactive communication with parents in order that teachers and parents understand each other's settings and

expectations, and learn how to be mutually supportive of the student, which may include some modifications of both settings.

It is perhaps also necessary, at this stage of children's literacy development, that teachers look beyond unstructured reading sessions (parent-to-child or child-to-parent), for patterns of child-parent interaction that are designed to move children along. Paired Reading, referred to earlier, is one such strategy, because it emphasizes choices of reading material which are beyond the child's existing reading level, but within the comprehension level of one parent. But for parents whose own literacy is extremely limited, other kinds of involvement must be planned and communicated, and more parent training and education may be required. Teachers do, in fact, make fewer reading-together suggestions to parents of children who are 9+, and are somewhat more likely to suggest such things as discussion following an assigned television program. But far fewer teachers seem to do the latter at all, though they generally approve of it. Nor do teachers commonly schedule formal parent education meetings or training programs. In fact, listening to their child read aloud is probably the only technique for parent involvement recommended frequently by most teachers. (Becker and Epstein, 1982) Other suggested practices, most of which remain formally untested, include scheduled library trips with parents, approval of reading and provision of a time and place for it, and discussion-centred activities with some in-school preparation, such as a parent-participation television workshop, in which

families watch a television program and discuss it, with teacher participation (Holbrook, 1985). Epstein (1987) suggests several ways to involve parents, which are applicable to older elementary school children, and to parents with low or no literacy:

1. Ask parents to take their children to the library.
2. Ask parents to get their children to talk about what they did that day in class.
3. Give an assignment that requires the children to ask their parents questions.
4. Ask parents to watch a specific television program with their children and to discuss the show afterward.
5. Suggest ways for parents to include their children in any of their own educationally enriching activities.
6. Send home suggestions for games or group activities, related to the children's schoolwork, that can be played by either parent and child, or by child and siblings.
7. Suggest how parents might use home materials and activities to stimulate their children's interest in reading, math and other subjects.
8. Establish a formal agreement whereby parents provide rewards and/or penalties based on the children's school performance or behavior.
9. Ask parents to come to observe the classroom (not to "help") for part of the day.
10. Explain to parents certain techniques for teaching, for making learning materials, or for planning lessons.
11. Ask parents to initial homework to ensure its completion.

4. At the intermediate and senior levels

For parents of older children, where simply listening to their children reading is insufficient, school-based programs may, if well-planned, encourage participation and interaction for children's benefit. That parent involvement continues to be significant to students' achievement well beyond the primary years is illustrated by a study of twenty American high schools, in which parent involvement was found to be the critical factor in the achievement and aspirations of the students. Parent involvement was defined by teachers' descriptions of parent interest/apathy, and by whether parents asked for opportunities to discuss their children's work. This parental involvement factor was significant even when students' ability and family educational background were taken into account. (McGill, Edward and associates, cited by Henderson, 1981, p. 48.)

In discussing differences in parent involvement at the elementary and secondary level, some writers emphasize significant differences between parents' expectations and school-related behavior at the two levels. While at the secondary level, "early warning" of academic problems becomes even more important to parents than it was when their children were younger, and personal contact is essential in such cases, other sorts of involvement, such as parent centres, volunteer programs, and parenting classes become much less salient and appropriate. Gotts and Purnell (1987) contrast elementary and secondary models of school-family relations in the following chart:

Models of School-Family Relations/Involvement

	Elementary	Secondary
Essential characteristics	-Relations are physically close; involvement in expressed by being present	Relations occur at a distance, with parents monitoring; involvement is being present when needed
Group Involvement	-General purpose parent groups (PTA/PTO)	Special purpose groups (athletics, band boosters)
Monitoring School Program	-Visits schools and reviews student work	Reads newsletter; visits only as needed
Teacher Contact	-Regularly visits teacher to discuss progress	Visits teacher if special need is identified
Academic Focus	-Basic skills, adjustment and social integration	Graduation credits and progress, specialized progress
Attendance Focus	-Child is present at school; is not excessively ill	Child is present in each class and on time (no cuts)
Conduct and Discipline	-Problems require parent-teacher discussion; child not routinely present	Problems require parent-teacher-student-other (counselor, principal) negotiation and agreement
School Events and Outcomes	-Events have a general focus for all parents of a classroom or school; the parent is to view all children's work as well as their own's; strengthens the sense of neighborhood and school ownership	Parents are drawn by interest or the child's involvement to sports, musical and dramatic events their child may be seen as an independent performer; strengthens the sense of a broader community and school ownership

There are very few examples of research-based parent-as-tutor programs at the secondary level. One of the exceptions is a program aimed at involving parents in their (grade eleven) children's writing assignments (Dolan and Caroselli, 1982). The teacher developed a set of work sheets for students to do in conjunction with a unit on developing paragraphs, elements of style, etc. Also developed were sheets for parents, advising them both on how to help with writing generally (discussing ideas,

encouraging dictionary use, proof-reading) and with the specific assignments. (The latter involved sheets which parents were to fill out and return.) After fifteen weeks, students in the experimental group improved significantly more than the control group -- and this improvement was considerably larger for the students with lower achievement records, suggesting that high school students most at-risk for poor performance may stand to benefit very significantly from planned parental involvement in their work. The experiment also indicates the willingness of secondary school parents to involve themselves. In this urban, 90% minority school, among students not in advanced level classes, students and parents completed, on average, 10.6 out of a total of 15 assessments.

Another study, this one of low-achieving, inner city grade 7 students, echoes the findings of the pre-school research, cited earlier. Students were assigned to one of four groups: control; reading class; a special, highly-structured, school-based tutoring program using trained but non-professional tutors; and a group whose parents were involved in restructuring the home environment to foster educational development. In the last group, a program supervisor visited each home, discussed the importance of parental involvement and support for academic achievement, and solicited the parents' agreement to work with their children in supportive ways for one hour per weeknight. There was weekly telephone contact and a weekly home visit. The program lasted ten weeks. Six months later, only the parent-involvement group maintained

achievement gains. The authors suggest that the program might run effectively with just an initial visit, and weekly telephone contact. (See Rodick and Henggeler, 1980.)

Finally, a very dramatic example of the importance of focused, personal, at-home contact with secondary parents and students comes from a school in West Virginia (grades 10-12) with a 29% drop-out rate (very similar to Toronto's). An additional guidance counsellor position was created at this school of 1750 students. The position was "home-school visitor" and the job was to devote full-time to conducting home interviews with the students who wanted to leave school prior to graduation, and with others identified by counselors, administrators and teachers as at high risk of dropping out. At the same time, a dropout re-entry program was created, in order to tailor an educational program to meet the career and academic needs of the returning learner and "to provide the returning student intense individual and group counselling experience in the relationship between freedom and responsibility, test-taking and study skills, assertive behavior, frustration tolerance and decision-making skills" (Marockie and Jones, 1987). Seven years later, the school's dropout rate fluctuates between 5% and 11%. The school system has now moved its dropout prevention program down into the elementary schools to address "the root causes of school alienation" by having retired teaching professionals volunteer to make "care calls" daily to all absent students. The volunteers were trained by the home-school visitor "to express concern at the absence of the student and to

solicit ways the school could help in the return of the student as soon as possible". (Ibid, pp. 202-203)

Programs such as these clearly address the link between parent involvement and school success and completion. A recent study based on the most comprehensive information available on dropouts from American secondary schools concludes that "students' home environment has a critical. . . impact on the decision to leave school. Policies should be developed to help parents increase their interest in and monitoring of their children's school progress." (Ekstrom et al., 1986, p. 371)

The literature on parent involvement in their children's secondary education suggests that parental involvement at that level is potentially as effective as at the elementary level, although it is much rarer to expect parents of secondary students to become involved as home-tutors. Because of the rotary system and subject specialization, it is much more difficult for parents to know their children's teachers, and also to feel competent to help older children with their work. Nonetheless, when secondary school parental involvement is successfully sought, it proves to be effective both in increasing students' achievement and in preventing dropping-out.

CHAPTER II. PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AT SCHOOL

1. Parents in the classroom

The research on the effects on children's achievement of parental involvement in school and classroom echoes that of parental involvement at home. Fullan (1982, pp. 197-200) reviews evidence from the United States and Canada which supports this relationship, even when the parent assists in a classroom other than her/his child's. It is probable that "by training the parent to teach in the school setting, the teacher can anticipate that the parent will transfer to the home environment some of his knowledge about stimulating the growth of the. . .child". (Karnes and Zehrback, 1972, p. 16) Since parent volunteers are often used in one-on-one teaching/learning situations, the skill and practice acquired are directly transferred to the home setting.

In reviews of numerous remedial programs and also in reviews of excellent schools, parent involvement as aides emerges, along with parents as home reinforcers of the learning process, as the decisive factor in distinguishing the successful programs. The limitation of parents as aides is that relatively few can become involved as paid workers, and very few volunteer. In her statewide survey in Maryland, Epstein (1984) found that about 70% of parents never helped the teacher in the classroom or in class trips. Over 40% of the mothers in the sample worked full-time, and only about 4% of the parents were very active in the school. While teachers and principals can encourage and train more parents

to help in the classroom, and while such an effort will have very substantial benefits for those families involved, the pressure of employment will prohibit many -- probably most -- parents from being involved in the classroom, except very occasionally.

A British educator comments that, if parent volunteer programs are emphasized, there is a danger that school staff will come to see such programs as the linchpin of their parental involvement program -- which they cannot be, because most parents simply cannot be at school during the day -- just as teachers who are parents cannot be volunteers at their children's schools. This writer also points out the dangerous error of assuming that parents who don't volunteer -- or who don't come to school for parents' nights -- aren't interested in their children's education.

> My views on parental involvement began to take shape when, as a probationary teacher in an inner city primary school, I became worried about the number of parents who appeared to show a lack of interest in their children's education -- at least when measured by the standard criterion of attendance at the school's "open evening". My subsequent experience of home visiting shamed me into rejecting the method I had so naively used as a means of assessing parental interest. Indeed, in all the homes I visited, I was chastened to find interest in education in abundance together with friendship freely offered in no small measure.
>
> (Green, 1985, p. 12)

2. Parents in the school

In a large-scale study of elementary schools and school achievement in Michigan, parental involvement in the school was found to significantly correlate with average school achievement state-wide; the relationship was particularly strong in schools with a majority of Black students (Brookover et al., 1979). Similarly, Armor and associates found that, for Black children, high levels of parent-teacher contact and of parent and community involvement in school decision-making were associated with higher student reading scores. (See Armor et al., 1976.) Lightfoot (1978) describes a Black urban school in which teachers encouraged and welcomed parents. From selling cakes, in the traditional volunteer role, mothers began to work in the library, finding readable books for children; in the lunch room, managing the traffic of hungry children; and in the halls, keeping track of wandering children or having private conversations with children who needed special attention. Finally, mothers began to work actively within classrooms and became actively involved in the schooling process. This process began with the traditional role of parent as fund-raiser but evolved gradually to a much more significant level of involvement.

It is important to recognize that the presence of parents in the school not only provides more adults to teach reading or offer help and support to children but also transforms the culture of the school. Lightfoot points out that with these Black mothers present, there is no way that the curriculum and environment could

remain unchanged. Even if the content of the lesson appears the same on paper, the transmission of the lesson takes on a different quality and character when presented by the mothers. Even if the concepts are unfamiliar and alien to the child's experience, the mother-teacher's style of interaction, her face, and her character are not strange. It feels like home.

The mothers reported that many behavioral and learning problems in school seemed to disappear when (1) their child experienced an alliance between mother and teacher; (2) the mothers were able to help teachers become more perceptive and responsive to the needs of their children. . .(Lightfoot, 1978, p. 173) Lightfoot's description emphasizes the transactional nature of effective home-school contact, in which, as a result of meaningful communication, both settings are changed, so that the two worlds of the child move closer together -- two worlds which may be especially far apart for minority children.

Many writers emphasize the importance of parent-school communication as a two-way process. When it is successful, changes occur at home and at school, so that the two environments become more similar and more familiar to children. Having parents involved in the school -- physically present as volunteers or as supportive community members -- immediately makes school more home-like for children. In England, many primary schools have seen a burgeoning of parent involvement that is initiated by the conversion of a spare classroom into a parents' room. In one

inner-city school in Liverpool, where many parents are undereducated and under- or unemployed, the spin-off from the success of an informal, drop-in parents' room, with a skilled teacher and an outreach worker assigned to the centre, has included a very successful parent volunteer program and well-attended adult education classes in English (for credit), computer studies, and parenting, including helping children learn to read. Involvement remains very high, with apparent gains in children's reading scores. Teachers have come to value parental help in the classroom and parents to value teachers' skills.

> "We found" said one parent, "that, where we were frightened of the teachers, the teachers were just as frightened of us". . .our original concept behind the Parent Support Program in Liverpool -- one of getting parents involved -- has been abandoned. The very title of Parent Support was considered to be condescending. It has been renamed a Parent-School Partnership because that is what we are all trying to achieve -- a true partnership between teachers and parents to the benefit of the child. (Gains and Pegg, 1984, p. 31)

In another English school, a parents' room appears to be not the first but a likely next step in a parent involvement program which, after 18 months of operation, has been highly evaluated by parents and staff. The headmaster found that most parents were uncomfortable about initiating contact with the school on educational issues, yet also afraid that teachers would not contact them early enough if their child had a problem or was not performing well at school.

> Determined to overcome this non-communication, we established a system of teaching clinics. . .to provide a weekly opportunity for parents and teachers to meet as and when the need arose. To do this we:

-allocated each member of staff a particular period on their timetable for that purpose (one per week);

-provided parents with printed details of these times;

-encouraged parents to telephone for an appointment whenever they felt there was a need;

-advised parents that staff would ask for a meeting at this time if they felt there was a need;

-made it clear that these clinics were to be a normal part of the school and were not to be seen as the response to a crisis. (M. A. Smith, 1987)

At least 15 minutes are allowed for each interview. Parents feel that the advantages are that problems are dealt with promptly, privately and efficiently, while they are still small. There are no long queues as on traditional parents' nights, and no other parents "breathing down one's neck" limiting privacy and confidentiality.

In a secondary school in a rural area of Ontario, an activity was implemented in order to effect more personalized communication between school and parents. The program is "simple in structure and. . .geared toward personalizing communication and increasing parent participation in school-related activities. . .based on personal contact and the assumption that parents are a resource worthy of respect". (Sutton and Lee, 1981) The program, introduced by a letter and a follow-up telephone call from the head of guidance (not a secretary), invited about a dozen sets of randomly selected parents to visit school on a weekday morning for coffee and doughnuts, <u>not</u> to discuss their children's progress, or to get a particular message or announcement from the school, but to visit with staff, exchange impressions of the school, its

program and its purpose, and to see demonstrated respect for their opinions and questions within a very informal structure. Counsellors present assured that all parents had equal opportunity and attention. After the session, a personal letter of thanks was sent to all who attended. About one hundred parents can be contacted per year in this way, using only two hours per month of staff time. It is interesting to note the details of the contact letter. The letter incorporated the following features:

> -It stressed interest in obtaining parental impressions of the school, emphasizing that such "get-togethers" would be a regular activity in the school.
>
> -It included a few examples of the concerns that might be discussed (e.g., new or unusual courses, extracurricular activities, attendance and report card systems, and post-secondary opportunities).
>
> -It listed names of other parents who had been invited, to give an idea of the size of the event, to allow those who perhaps knew one another to make travel arrangements, and most of all, to allow some reassurance that no one individual would feel on the spot with nothing to say.
>
> -It stated the time and date of the session and the name of the person who would be calling to confirm whether or not the parents would be able to attend.
>
> -It was mailed in order to arrive by Thursday so that parents might think about the event throughout the weekend. (Sutton and Lee, 1981, p. 18)

While this strategy has limitations for working parents, the schedule could be varied to include evening sessions in an attempt to accommodate as many parental schedules as possible.

These examples, from the United States, England, and Canada suggest that elementary and secondary schools can reach out to

bring parents into the school on a small, but intensive scale, where many parents can be seen individually or in small groups on an occasional basis. They suggest that, like parent involvement at home, parent involvement at school, if genuinely sought after and carefully thought out, can benefit students in both elementary and secondary school. A recent example of aggressive outreach for parent involvement at school is a satellite learning centre which creates a school in the workplace. In Dade County, Florida, such a centre now accommodates 24 kindergarten students, and will expand to include grades 1 and 2. It serves children whose parents work for the insurance company in which it is housed. The firm provides the space. Because they are aware that achievement is linked to the home-school relationship, officials are enthusiastic about a school which will allow working parents to meet easily with teachers. (See Education USA, 1987.)

While the evidence is very strong that parental involvement in children's education at home or at school makes a significant difference to their children's progress, the evidence for such an effect from parental involvement in school governance and decision-making is by no means as strong. Fullan (1982, p. 200) reports that "there is little evidence to suggest that other, non-instructional forms of parent involvement directly affect student learning in the school". Fullan adds that finding no relationship does not, by itself, prove any specific hypothesis. "Is the lack of relationship due to poorly implemented governance councils (or parent advisory groups)? That is, if they worked as

intended, would there be a positive impact?" (Ibid, p. 202) There certainly is no conclusive answer to this question, and no doubt that parental involvement at the level of the child and her/his program and teacher rather than the school as a whole is the much more certain route to increasing children's opportunities and educational outcomes. But it is nonetheless interesting to note that one of the most-publicized examples of a school which increased student achievement significantly is from a school which maximized parent involvement at the whole school level.

In the success story of the New Haven schools, parent involvement in school governance was pivotal.

> In 1969, our first year, we worked with two schools in which the level of achievement of fourth-grade students was ranked 32nd and 33rd in the city. Students were about 18 and 19 months behind national achievement levels on standardized tests. The attendance was among New Haven's lowest, and students in both schools exhibited severe behavior problems. In 1986, the original project school -- with no change in its socioeconomic makeup -- tied for third in achievement out of 26 elementary schools, and students ranked about a year above grade level by the fourth grade on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. This school has ranked among the top five schools in attendance for the last seven years, and there have been no serious behavior problems in the school for well over a decade.
>
> Under the direction of John Dow, superintendent of the New Haven Schools, the model is being used in all of the low-income elementary schools as part of his overall school improvement plan, Project Excell. It is also being developed in two middle schools in preparation for application to all New Haven middle schools. In addition, a modification of the original model is being used in one of the high schools and in several other school systems. (Comer, 1987, p. 16)

The key element in this whole school (building level) intervention which involved teacher education and a specified

curriculum elective plan is the governance and management group, which represented all the adults in the building-teachers selected by teachers, parents by parents, and the principal acting as group leader.

> The comprehensive representation within this group enabled issues which arose from pupil personnel service work to be brought to the attention of the governance and management group and helped members plan programs sensitive to child development and behavior principles. As the school staff addressed problems and perceived the opportunities inherent in this model, they began to value and internalize it. (Ibid p. 15)

The model is now being used in all the low-income elementary schools in New Haven, as part of an overall school improvement plan, Project Excell. It is also being developed in two middle schools, with the intention of eventually applying it in all of New Haven's middle schools; and a modified model is being used in one New Haven high school and in several other school systems.

The New Haven experience suggests that a parental role in school governance may be related to very significant achievement gains, when that role is made truly integral to a school's central policy-making, and when a school has a very defined and significant decision-making focus and structure. But the governance and management group, central as it is, is not acting in a vacuum in the New Haven schools, and its power may be derived as Fullan suggests, synergistically: that is, multiple forms of involvement may have an impact greater than the sum of the individual activity components.

CHAPTER III. CONNECTING PARENTS AND SCHOOLS

1. Why it works

Why does involving parents directly as reinforcers of the school have such a powerful effect on children's achievement? Common sense suggests that, since children spend so much of their time at home, the people there -- parents, siblings, grandparents -- are powerful models who may or may not reinforce messages like "reading is a desirable way to spend time" or "talking about things helps you to understand them better" or "being observant is a good thing". When they do, and when these messages are consistent with those given by teachers, children are far more likely to absorb them. When learning isn't reinforced it is extinguished, and home reinforcement may be essential, especially for young children.

> The developmental potential of participation in multiple settings [i.e, home and school] will vary directly with the ease and extent of two-way communication between those settings. Of key importance in this regard is the inclusion of the family in the communications network (for example, the child's development in both family and school is facilitated by the existence of open channels of communication in both directions). (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 217)

Additionally, Bronfenbrenner hypothesizes that the existence of direct personal linkages between various behavioral settings functions to enhance the developmental potential of a setting. Thus, a child whose parent(s) is acquainted with the teacher is likely to learn more than she would if that connection did not

exist. Bronfenbrenner suggests that this important linking begins at the beginning: when, for example, the parent accompanies the child to a new school and brings her to her teacher.

The more the parent is linked to the teacher(s), the more likelihood there is a "goal consensus between settings and an evolving balance of power in favor of the developing person". (p. 212) That is, rather than being caught in a potential conflict between parental and teacher expectations -- for example, with regard to homework demands -- the child is likely to find that parent and teacher expectations are similar, and to experience this consensus as supportive and affirmative. The ideal links to the child's school are her parents -- persons with whom she has developed a primary relationship.

When the child sees her parent visit the class, talk to the teacher, or receive a personal note from the teacher which is read to the child, the likelihood increases that the child will feel that her two worlds overlap and that she is at home in both. The positive impact of this kind of relationship, it is posited, is strongest for those with the least prior experience of it -- the young and minorities, for example. Bronfenbrenner also suggests that the more personal the mode of communication (e.g., face-to-face versus telephone, telephone versus form letter, etc.), the more powerful. His conclusion is that "a key to the enhanced effectiveness of public education lies not within the school itself but in its interconnections with other settings of

the society." (Ibid, p. 226.)

Bronfenbrenner emphasizes that communication must be two-way. While schools must often serve as initiators, parents must not be assigned a passive role as recipients rather than co-communicators. Thus, in a study of low income families of children in a school characterized by low average achievement, Ogbu (1974) found no difference in achievement levels between children whose parents were, versus those whose parents were not, involved in the school. He points out that communication at that school was one-way: school to parent. Parents' opinions were never genuinely solicited, and the relationship between school personnel and parents was that of patron to client. He suggests that, given such unequal power and communication, no effect should be expected of parent involvement "except perhaps in the form of teachers feeling more sympathetic to children of parents who demonstrate proper deference." (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 253)

> ---Ogbu's results underscore the importance of bi-directional as against one-way communication, the existence of accurate information, mutual trust, positive feelings, and a sense of common goals in each group about the other, and above all a balance of power responsive to the needs of the developing person and to the efforts of those acting on his behalf. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, pp. 254-255)

Another way of describing a school which has succeeded in bridging the gap between home and school for children is to describe school settings which are family-like and family settings which are school-like. The latter condition is met when parents function by encouraging intellectual development -- through discussion, reading, approval of school work, respect for children's efforts, provision of a regular quiet time, and so

forth. The former condition -- the family-like-school -- is achieved in schools which treat students as unique individuals, as a family would do. "They make students feel part of a school family that is concerned for their welfare. The evidence is strong in research and practice that persistent or successful students establish close relations and family-like ties to individual teachers in high school" (Epstein, 1986b). The author suggests, like Bronfenbrenner and others, that families and schools should be seen as overlapping rather than separate and exclusive spheres of influence on children, at all ages. To the extent that parents and teachers perceive that they share an interest in the developing persons in their charge, they will also perceive their interdependence -- that it is difficult for parental or school influence to have the desired impact in the absence of support from the other half of the young person's adult world.

How can these conditions be met in a school? How can parents be connected to teachers in a way that is beneficial to children? Many model programs exist, and some will be described below. While Ogbu's statement that they will not work effectively without a foundation of mutual trust and willingness and ability to share goals and authority is undoubtedly true, it may also be true that engagement in parent-involving activities and two-way home-school communication may be the vehicle to building such trust and mutual respect, as well as a prerequisite to increased school success for children.

2. How it works

What are the characteristics of effective parent involvement programs, whether directed at parent involvement at home, at school, or both?

> ---it should be pointed out that most research studies do not identify a single strategy for or mode of parent involvement that is related to higher achievement, but rather suggest that the greater the general involvement, the higher the performance level of students.
>
> (Kagan & Schraft, 1983, p. 27)

In addition to the above-stated principle that the best parent involvement is the most parent involvement, Fullan (1982, p. 208) suggests that "parent involvement is most productive when the objectives are clear and when parent activities are clearly known. . ." and points out, in reviewing the preschool follow-up research, that the successful "parent as tutor" programs provided training to parents in home instruction, and included the monitoring of parents' and children's progress through home instruction -- both indicators of clarity and seriousness of purpose in parent involvement. Similarly, Epstein (1985) cites four essential components in organizing parent involvement: clear goals; appropriate materials; two-way, transactional communication; and follow-up activities -- so that parent and students are reinforced for their efforts by recognition and documentation of results.

Another review (Becher, 1985, pp. 100-108) suggests two sets of principles upon which successful programs rest. The first set includes principles related to beliefs or perspectives about

parents. These include:

Parents already make important contributions to their children's education. "Successful programs emphasize the strengths of parents and let them know that these strengths are valued."

Parents can make additional contributions. "Successful programs help parents to identify what new things parents are capable of doing."

Parents can learn new parenting techniques. "This perspective. . .suggests that parents have both the ability and interest to expand their parenting strategies and techniques".

Parents have important perspective on their children. "Successful programs recognize that the perspective parents have about their children are important and useful to teachers."

Parent-child relationships are different from teacher-child relationships. "Successful programs suggest activities for parents to undertake with their children at home that make use of family situations in reaching goals. Furthermore, successful programs consult with parents when selecting and developing activities for use at home."

Most parents really care about their children. "Another principle of successful parent involvement programmmes that they hold and express a sincere belief that most parents really care about their children."

Parents have many reasons for their involvement. "a successful program focuses on the good feelings generated in the parents and the positive relationships provided for the child and consider(s) in effect that the purposes of parent involvement have been achieved."

Principles concerning program goals, activities and practices include the following:

Goals, purposes and activities are matched. For example, if the goal is to improve relationships with parents and to help improve children's achievement, then volunteer activities which emphasize clerical duties in the main office are not appropriate.

Staff skills and available resources are considered. "Successful programs look at the staff's development and choose to do what is reasonable and productive rather than trying to 'do it all'."

Variations in parents' skills are recognized. "Successful programs reflect the realization that all parents do not need to be involved in the same ways."

Program activities are flexible and creative.

Expectations, roles, and responsibilities are communicated. "One of the major areas of unease and conflict in parent involvement concerns who does what, where and how."

Parents are involved in decision-making and administrative decisions are explained. "In successful parent involvement programs, there is a strong emphasis on the communication of information."

Problems are expected but solutions are emphasized. "In successful parent involvement programs, there is an expectation and an anticipation of problems. As a result, policies and procedures for dealing with them are developed and communicated to parents."

Optimum versus maximum involvement is sought. ". . .so that all these involved enjoy rather than resent their involvement."

Board policies also significantly influence teachers' parent-communication and involvement practices -- including home visiting practices and parent involvement with schoolwork at home. Such Board-level influence may be achieved through recruitment practices, in-service training, or clearly expressed expectations and directives. (See Becker and Epstein, 1982, pp. 37-38.) Boards can recognize and reward outstanding parent-involvement programs; hold an annual conference on parent involvement, and invite parents, educators, and others; and make public service announcements to encourage parents to become more involved in working with and in schools. (See Lamm, 1986.)

The importance of Board-level commitment to the implementation of an increased parent-involvement program has been

identified as crucial by a recent review of parent partnership programs.

Although not necessarily present to the same degree in all programs, there seem to be certain other characteristics important to the continued operation and effectiveness of the programs. These elements involve both the school system and its orientation toward the parents. The school system characteristics are:

- Leadership at the district and school level seems to have been actively committed to strengthening home-school relations. One example of this active commitment can be seen in programs where the superintendent and other officials from the central administration have taken over classes while regular teachers hold conferences with parents.

- Widespread support among parents, teachers, businesses and other segments of the community for the plan to improve home-school relations is also an element found in a number of the programs. The utilization of a wide variety of resources found among business people, parents, social agencies and other community sources seems to have contributed to the development of a positive climate by expanding the number of individuals and organizations that become stakeholders in the program.

- Appropriate staff training and orientation in areas appropriate to particular programs, such as human relations and cross-cultural relations, conferencing techniques, and career counselling appear to have had a large impact on program success. This has been especially true in locations with large numbers of low-income and racial minority families.

- It appears that the operational climate was greatly enhanced when teachers and their representative organizations were included in the planning and decision-making aspects of the program.

- Computers have been used in a creative fashion to produce not only individual test scores, but also study prescriptions, educational requirements for jobs of interest, and other information for parents to use in counselling and instructing their children.

School system orientation toward parents contains these features:

- Although there was much urging and a persistent effort to get parents involved, participation, as far as we know, has in fact been voluntary in all of the programs.

- To increase family involvement, some programs have made special efforts to accommodate the diverse interests and circumstances of the parents they serve. For example, some parent-teacher conferences are held in the evenings or on Saturdays, some programs provide bilingual assistance for parents who do not speak English well, and some offer parents cultural programs and social service information while they are at school for conferences.

- Quite a number of programs have managed to avoid, by design or accident, stigmatizing students with academic or behavioral problems by opening the program to all parents thus avoiding a focus on any single group of students or parents.

- In many of the programs it was stated or implicitly understood that the parent is a co-partner in the collaborative effort to improve student learning.

(See Collins et al., 1982)

On the importance of formal, system-wide policy to the implementation of parent involvement and partnership programs, a recent article states:

> Authoritative policies are needed whenever the proposed change (e.g., open enrollment schools, parent participation in decision-making, home tutoring activities, individual education contracts) represents a significant departure from existing organizational norms and procedures or whenever the new activity requires individual or organizational risks. The wording of the policies is also crucial, as the minimum requirements tend to become the maximum performance.
>
> All of this means that if a local school board decides that it wants to increase parent involvement of certain kinds, it should translate this decision into a set of clear and authoritative written policies to be put into place through the usual legislative or collective bargaining channels. Merely expressing general support for parent involvement or adopting a policy of "good intentions" is not likely to produce change. (Davies, 1987, p. 161)

The same author concludes that a key element of a successful program will be "a clear, authoritative, written local policy designed to produce the kinds of parent involvement that local

decision makers want" (Ibid, p. 161).

His words are echoed by the findings of a survey of parents, school superintendents, and school board presidents in seven states in the U.S. which found that:

> School district policies encouraging parent involvement need to be written and formalized. Responses from superintendents and school board presidents indicate that the existence of formal, written policies encouraging parent involvement is related to increased parent activity at a variety of levels in schools. (Chavkin and Williams, 1987)

In addition to clearly expressed expectations and directives about parent involvement in homework and other school and learning- related activities, policies about teacher recruitment and in-service programs can reflect a district's commitment to parent participation. (See Epstein, 1987)

CHAPTER IV. PARENT-TEACHER PARTNERSHIP: OVERCOMING BARRIERS AND GETTING COMMITMENT

While the formal and real commitment of senior level and school administrators is essential to the success of parent involvement programs, it is not sufficient. Both parents and teachers must also welcome the opportunity to work together for children's benefit, and must replace existing assumptions that act as barriers to coordinated school-home efforts and curricula. For example:

Existing Assumptions:	New Assumptions:
1. Academic competence results from the successful completion of tasks under the direction of a teacher in a school.	1. Academic competence results from the successful completion of activities both in families and in schools, particularly as these activities are reinforced through the interaction of the child with both parents and teachers.
2. Teachers are primarily responsible for decisions about the academic (mainly cognitive) growth of children in school, while parents are expected to make the major decisions about the physical and social or emotional development of the children in the family.	2. As the persons who are closest to the learner, parents and teachers together should design and implement educational environments that that will assist children in their cognitive, affective and physical development in the family and school.
3. The important variables in the family that affect academic competence are essentially unalterable.	3. The important variables in the family environment that affect academic competence can be altered to support the learning of children.

4. The organizational conditions that hinder teachers from including the home environment as part of the curriculum are practically impossible to influence from inside the school.	4. Teachers and administrators can provide leadership from inside the school to develop a curriculum that appropriately combines family and school environments.

Taken from Ghory, 1980, pp. 36-41

1. Parents and parent involvement

There is abundant evidence, some of which has been cited earlier, to indicate that the majority of parents respond positively and actively to teachers' requests that they help their children at home. Similarly, the majority of parents in most public schools in the City of Toronto do come to school when invited to a meet-the-teacher night, or a report card conference. Parents show strong evidence of a desire to be more involved in and useful to their children's formal education. But, as many writers have pointed out, it is the better-educated and more privileged parents who are most likely to be proactive in initiating contact with the schools. In a very recent survey of a small sample of children in grades 5 through 8 in a few inner city schools in Toronto, we found that many of the parents of the most successful students in the schools were in frequent contact with their child's teacher, while this was less likely to be true of families whose children were doing poorly. Further, several of the parents in the first group were initiators of school contact -- causing teachers and interviewer to describe them as "middle-class like". (See Hardwick et al., in progress.)

While many parents depend on teacher initiation, most parents are very responsive to positive expressions of interest and concern by teachers, and will implement their suggestions at home. Many surveys show that parents are eager for more information and teacher-initiated involvement. Many parents receive little communication from the school, and may be apprehensive about

asking for more information. But when teachers do reach out to involve parents, the response is great.

> Parents were aware of and responded positively to teachers' efforts to involve them in learning activities at home. Parents with children in the classrooms of teachers who built parent involvement into their regular teaching practice were more aware of teachers' efforts, received more ideas from teachers, knew more about their child's instructional program, and rated the teachers higher in interpersonal skills and overall teaching quality. Teachers' practices had consistently strong and positive effects on parent reactions to the school program and on parent evaluations of teachers' merits for parents at all educational levels, net of all other variables. Teacher practices of parent involvement had more dramatic positive links to parents' reactions than general school-to-home communication or parent assistance at the school. (Epstein, 1986a, p. 291)

An extensive body of survey research on parent involvement from an American jurisdiction reports the following:

- Parents were generally positive about their children's elementary schools, but over 90% wanted teachers to take responsibility to tell them how to help their children at home.

- Parents were often excluded from the most common types of communication with teachers. Over 1/3 had no parent-teacher conference during the school year to discuss their child with the teacher. And, about 60% of the parents surveyed did not talk to the teacher by phone during the school year.

- Working mothers and single parents volunteer less often to work at school, but help their children at home on school work as much or more than mothers who work at home or married parents.

- Parents who are frequently involved by teachers in learning activities at home report that they <u>know more</u> about their child's instructional program, <u>believe the teacher wants them to help</u> at home, <u>get more ideas</u> from teachers about how to help at home.

- Parents view teachers' use of parent involvement techniques as a teaching strength. They give teachers who are leaders in the use of parent involvement <u>higher ratings in interpersonal skills and overall teaching</u> ability. (Epstein, 1985, p. 5)

Public opinion polls in Canada and the United States consistently indicate that, the closer the contact between tax-payer and school, the more positive the attitude. Thus, in a 1984 Canadian opinion poll on education conducted by the Canadian Education Association (Flower, 1984), while 44% of all adult respondents rated their local school good to excellent, 61% of parents with children in school did so. Insofar as "users" rate schools higher than non-users, this finding is consistent with the empirical data cited above indicating that parents who have frequent contact with teachers have the most positive attitudes to their children's school and teachers.

2. Teachers and parent involvement

The several surveys which ask teachers about parent involvement are consistent in finding that teachers overwhelmingly believe that schools cannot solve problems without parents' help, and also believe that parents' involvement in their children's education is strongly and positively related to the children's achievement. In spite of this, investigators frequently find that many parents say they receive very little communication from teachers about how they can help their children, or how they can be involved in co-educating them.

Teachers often wait for parents to initiate contact, and assume a passive role. Thus, in a survey this year of parents of American school children, the pollsters found that half the teachers surveyed said parents did not make enough effort to approach them to talk about their children's education, and over half said they felt uneasy or reluctant to approach parents (Metropolitan Life Survey, 1987). Factors such as grade taught and amount of training received appear to affect the amount of parent communication initiated by teachers. Teachers of primary grades and teachers with more advanced training -- but not necessarily with more teaching experience -- were found to be more likely to use parent involvement in learning activities at home (Epstein, 1985).

While teachers profess to believe in the efficacy of parent involvement, many of them acknowledge their lack of training and expertise in bringing about parent collaboration. (Parnell and

Gotts, 1985) Several handbooks and guides to training teachers to work with parents are available. (Examples include Nedler and McAfee, 1979; Rotter and Robinson, 1982; and Williams and Chavkin, 1985.) Appropriate training can make a difference to teachers' readiness to involve parents and to the level of communication skill they bring to the telephone call, conference, or classroom visit.

That teachers may have many misapprehensions about their ability to successfully work with parents is well-illustrated by this summary paragraph from a review article:

> Research to determine some of the specific factors that impede the initiation and establishment of parental participation have indicated a number of important concerns. First, teachers report that they feel uncertain about how to involve parents and still maintain their role as specialized experts . . .Second, teachers indicate that they are uncertain about how to balance their concern for the group of children against a more personalized concern for each individual child, which they feel would be expected if parents were more involved. . .Further, a report by the National Education Association. . .indicates that teachers believe planning for parent involvement activities takes too much time. This report also states that teachers express concern that parents will try to take over teaching responsibilities and that they won't follow the teacher's instructions and school regulations. They are also concerned that parents will cause confusion and disrupt the classroom because they don't know how to work productively with children and that parents may use nonstandard English or demonstrate other characteristics teachers do not want introduced into the classroom. Other concerns teachers expressed were that parents would not keep their commitments, would discuss confidential information with their friends, and would be too critical and therefore make teachers uncomfortable. (Becher, 1985, p. 99)

But one of the more striking findings in the area of teacher

response to parent involvement is the extent to which teachers who do actively involve parents manage to overcome barriers that other teachers see as well-nigh insurmountable -- that is, that teachers learn by doing. Teachers who are not proactive in involving parents often profess doubt about whether certain kinds of parents are willing or able to be involved in helping their children at home and/or in communicating with the school -- working parents, working class parents, non-English speaking parents, immigrant parents, single parents -- the "doubtful" list is long.

But teachers who take the initiative in reaching out to parents do not seem to be defeated by such presumed barriers. Thus, while, according to one large-scale survey, teachers are evenly split in their belief that they can influence parents to help their children in particular ways at home, those teachers who actually do actively and frequently use parent involvement find they are able to successfully include parents of all educational backgrounds, not only the well-educated. Further,

> - teachers who use parent involvement activities show more appreciation of parents and report more cooperation from parents than do other teachers.
>
> - teachers who frequently involve parents rate them higher in helpfulness and follow-through on learning activities than do other teachers. Teachers who do not include parents in their teaching practice rate single parents and less-educated parents as less helpful and less responsible than married and better-educated parents. (Epstein, 1985, p. 4)

The same researcher found that unlike other teachers, these teachers who frequently use parent involvement make equal demands on single and married parents to help at home, and rate single and

married parents as equally helpful and responsible in completing learning activities. Other teachers actually made greater demands on single rather than married parents, and rated them as less helpful and responsible.

> The contrasts are significant: teachers who had organized the frequent use of parent involvement were able to get good results from all parents -- not just those who are traditionally thought to be helpful to teachers and to children. (Epstein, 1987, p. 131)

> Perhaps the ability of motivated teachers to successfully involve a wide cross-section of parents is traceable to the fact that many of the necessary skills are characteristics of good teachers -- for example, caring, relating, individualizing, personalizing, selecting appropriate activities, reinforcing, teaching, explaining, reteaching and evaluating. For the majority of teachers, it is a lack of awareness, priorities and attention that hinders the development of successful involvement programs. Once teachers develop a commitment to parent involvement, they can begin to more systematically use the skills they already possess in achieving optimum and successful involvement. (Becher, 1985, pp. 108-109)

Such findings corroborate much of the preschool research, cited earlier, that educators can create conditions which facilitate involvement by all parents, not just those who become involved in their children's education on their own initiative. While training in communication and related skills is useful, it is gaining commitment which is essential.

Many writers make the point that the sine qua non of successful parent involvement programs is the realization by teachers that parent involvement is desirable because it is inextricably tied to children's achievement. When teachers fail to appreciate this connection, their parent involvement practices

tend to be hollow rituals, are perceived to be so by parents, and, hence, fail.

> Teachers frequently ask, "How do I get parents involved? How do I get them to attend meetings?" But the real question that each teacher needs to ask is, "Do I really want to involve the parents?" Only when the answer is an unqualified "Yes" will the means to do this become feasible.
>
> (M. Smith, 1970)

Board policies, in-service training, concern for parent involvement as a criterion in hiring and promoting are all vehicles for heightening educators' sensitivity and responsiveness and overcoming barriers to parent involvement. But the issue of increasing equity of educational outcomes by bringing all parents into an effective partnership with the schools to educate their children is one which can best be addressed at the level of the school and the teacher, with support from administrators.

Board policies alone cannot guarantee any change in parent-involvement practices at the school or classroom level. They can raise the level of awareness of administrators and teachers of the significance of parental involvement to student achievement and to retention of students at the secondary school level. Policies can be substantially reinforced by in-service training for teachers and principals, and by the provision of trained personnel above and beyond the regular staff -- such as parent educators, parent education coordinators, or extra personnel in guidance or elsewhere whose job is defined as home visiting or other forms of parent contact. Such provisions involve expense, and may or may not be feasible in individual

cases. But it is clear that teachers and principals can, especially with central support, increase parental involvement and with it, students' success. The essential first step is an awareness of the singular importance of involved parents to children's academic success.

> In conclusion, it is important to reiterate the fact that there is extensive, substantial, and convincing evidence regarding the critical role of parents in the development and education of their children. There is also considerable evidence indicating that parents can be trained to engage in a variety of practices that positively affect their children's development and education. In addition, there is limited but growing research regarding the effectiveness of specific parental and program practices. Again, while caution and concerns exist that must not be ignored when encouraging parent involvement, these are not barriers. Responsiveness to the issues may ensure that the increasing optimism regarding the improvement of educational opportunities for children through parent involvement will be justified. (Becher, 1985, p. 113)

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